

CUSTOMER-BASED PRODUCT DESIGN MODULE

Abstract of the Disclosure

A network of data processing-based and telecommunications-based apparatuses and systems are disclosed, including a product sub-system that interacts with a user, gathers information from the user, communicates the information to the product's vendor, and receives new pre-programmed interactions from the vendor for future interactions with the user. In addition to this computing/networking apparatus which is a sub-system in or attached to a product or service, other components of this invention include a data processing system for constructing and downloading pre-programmed interactions to the product sub-system; a communications sub-system for transmitting the data directly from the product sub-system to the vendor's computer; a communications apparatus for reading the product sub-system's data, transmitting it to the vendor's computer, and downloading new pre-programmed interactions to the product sub-system; a data processing system that resides in the product sub-system and conducts numerous types of interactions with a user; and a data processing system that resides in the vendor's computer and analyzes and reports the information gathered from product users. This invention may be built into a variety of products and services to establish networks of customer-vendor interactions and communications.

It makes possible new customer roles and contributions to the design and development of products and services, and the nature of customer-vendor relationships. A variety of functions are enabled by this invention, which include (depending on the configuration of a particular product

sub-system) inquiries, reports, suggestions, help, interactive services, transactions and two-way real-time communications. As a complete system, this invention may be viewed as a new medium through which customers interact directly with products and services at the time they are using them, to describe their conception of what the product or service should be and how the vendor should work with them to satisfy their needs better. The customer data, suggestions and other information are transmitted to the product vendor's computer where they are collected, analyzed by automated means and presented in automated reports to product managers, product designers and other decision makers. This source of continuous customer-based information may assist in improving products, services and customer relationships both sooner and more accurately, thereby producing strategic business advantages over competitors who do not engage in a similar improvement dialog with their customers. Over time, the cost of incorporating such sub-systems may fall and the impact from using them may rise, producing a greater reliance on customer involvement and customer input into a growing range of business decisions. This may produce a gradual transfer, from vendors to customers, of conceptual commercial guidance, both in individual cases and in aggregate. This invention suggests the emergence of a "partnership capitalist" economy in which a variety of interactive products and services link customers and vendors with networks that are built into those products and services, producing greater understanding, efficiency and accuracy in designing, manufacturing and selling the products, services and lifestyles that customers truly want.